

**Minutes are subject to the review and approval of the Waterfowl
Advisory Committee at its February 15, 2005 meeting.**

Minutes
Waterfowl Advisory Committee Meeting
December 7, 2004
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Stephen Davis, Carlyle Blakeney, Jr., Campbell Coxe, Lin Fore, Sam Hiott, Jr., Robin Inabinet, Spencer Leavitt, Craig LeSchack, Phil Wilkinson

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Billy Ray Cato, "Tadpole" Baldwin, Jr., Craig Sasser, Bill Towles

DNR BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Michael McShane and Vice Chairman Michael Campbell, II, Stephen Davis, Smith Ragsdale

DNR STAFF PRESENT: John Frampton, Breck Carmichael, Derrell Shipes, Tim Ivey; Buddy Baker; Sam Chappellear, Tom Swaynham, Jim Westerhold, Bob Perry, Bob Joyner, Walt Rhodes, Chris Page, Steve DeKozlowski, Dean Harrigal, Jim Quinn

DNR Board Chairman Michael McShane opened the meeting by introducing Stephen Davis as the newly appointed Chairman of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee.

Chairman Davis began the meeting by reviewing the history of how the Waterfowl Advisory Committee (WAC) evolved stating the Committee was created as an ad hoc committee of the DNR Board to replace and augment efforts of the previous Waterfowl Focus Group. By doing so, the WAC was charged with the responsibility for the oversight of regulation and habitat recommendations, removing these responsibilities from the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee, which is a standing Committee of the DNR Board. Although these responsibilities were removed from the WFF Advisory Committee, Breck Carmichael, Deputy Director of the WFF Division, supports the efforts of this group and its endeavors for waterfowl and for the WAC as a direct report to the DNR Board. Davis further stated the Committee was created by the DNR Board on September 19, 2003 with its first meeting on February 4, 2004. Subsequent meetings were held in March, April and July. Chairman Davis stated former Chairman of the WAC, Smith Ragsdale, kept the DNR Board abreast of all activities of the WAC. Davis applauded the efforts of the WAC to date, recognizing the diligence of individuals associated with the WAC, as well as individuals outside the Committee. Davis indicated as the new Chairman of the WAC, he intends for the same momentum and energy to continue in a positive fashion.

The minutes of the July 9, 2004 WAC meeting were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Carlyle Blakeney stated he had received several positive comments on the re-initiation of the Wood Duck Box Project.

Phil Wilkinson stated that he visited South Island with DNR Biologists Jamie Dozier and Bob Joyner on December 6th. During the visit they missed going to five impoundments due to time/gas constraints, but still managed a count of nearly 50,000 ducks. Wilkinson said this was a positive development and is reminiscent of historic South Island.

Lin Fore stated he had served on a lot of these type committees in the past and feels that a lot of progress had been made by the Committee and he hopes the Committee continues on its current path.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS:

David Wielicki, representing the SC Waterfowl Association (SCWA), thanked the Committee and Davis for his leadership of the Committee and former Chairman Ragsdale for his past work. Wielicki stated the SCWA would continue to work with the WAC in every way possible regarding the efforts of the Santee Cooper project, as well as working with DNR staff and the Fish and Wildlife Service to help continue improvements that are being made.

WAC MISSION STATEMENT:

Chairman Davis stated Craig LeSchack accepted the task of developing a draft Mission Statement for the WAC. Copies were distributed to Committee members. LeSchack indicated the need for a document to guide the Committee toward objectives the Committee should be considering in its sphere of influence. In reviewing the statement, LeSchack stated it is the Committee's mission to work with DNR staff to improve wetland habitats to accommodate migrating, wintering and breeding waterfowl populations and to provide a quality recreational experience for the citizens of South Carolina. LeSchack listed the following goals: provide enough quality waterfowl habitat to sustain breeding, migrating and wintering populations; increase hunting opportunities on public lands; improve the quality of the waterfowl hunting experience; develop solutions to conflicts between public area hunters and private landowners who manage for waterfowl and to strengthen the relationship between the DNR and waterfowl enthusiasts.

It was decided that Committee members would review the Mission Statement and offer changes or suggestions to LeShack prior to the February 2005 meeting. The Mission Statement is attached to the original minutes.

EARLY WMA DRAW HUNT RESULTS:

Derrell Shipes, the DNR's Wildlife Section Chief, Statewide Projects, Research & Survey, gave a brief report of the success of the public drawing hunts. Shipes stated during the first waterfowl season (Thanksgiving week) three Category I areas were hunted. Those areas were Broad River, Sandy Beach and Santee Coastal Reserve (The Cape) Wildlife Management Areas. The hunts resulted in a total harvest of 120 ducks, which included thirty-five duck hunters who took 3.43 ducks per hunter, with 577 shots being fired.

Shipes stated Category II areas (normally open one day per week for morning hunting) hunted the opening week included Crackerneck, The Hatchery and Lake Cunningham Wildlife Management Areas. On those areas, 63 ducks were harvested with ninety-eight hunters, 0.64 ducks per hunter, and 646 shells discharged.

Shipes further stated one adult/youth hunt was held in Clemson and in that area 2 ducks were harvested which included six hunters and 7 shots being fired. The overall results were 185 ducks harvested by 139 hunters with 1.33 ducks per hunter, with 1,230 shells being discharged.

Shipes indicated WMA results would be posted on the DNR web site weekly. This information is obtainable on DNR's web page as a news item and in the hunting area under WMA hunt results.

WOOD DUCK BOX PROGRAM UPDATE:

Waterfowl Biologist Bob Perry provided a progress report on the Governor's Wood Duck Nest Project. It was initiated months ago to re-invigorate the Statewide Wood Duck Nest Box Project, which DNR operated from 1982 until 2002. Data collection and reporting on active nest boxes still occurs, but due to a reallocation of State Duck Stamp revenue in 2003, distribution of new boxes was curtailed.

Perry advised that funding for the current project's materials was received from private sources. Staff and inmates at the Wateree Correctional Institute fabricated and branded approximately 2,200 wood duck nest boxes. Perry stated staff is in the process of moving these boxes to 9 DNR distribution points. DNR's goal for this year was to distribute approximately 1,000 nest boxes. Staff has reviewed 131 applications with 116 being approved. Boxes will be distributed to cooperators beginning December 13th.

Perry's report (copy attached to the original minutes) reflects a summary of expenditures and construction costs. Perry also reported a very positive working relationship with Wateree Correctional Institute. Director Frampton stated he has recently spoken with Department of Corrections Director, John Ozmint, who indicated their continued commitment to DNR regarding this project.

PINTAIL/MALLARD TELEMETRY PROJECT:

Waterfowl Biologist Walt Rhodes gave an update of the Northern pintail satellite-telemetry project, stating this is the second year of the project, in cooperation with New York Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit at Cornell University.

Rhodes stated DNR personnel targeted pintails at trapping sites in cooperation with federal personnel and private landowners. A total of 8 hen pintails were captured and fitted with satellite transmitters in February 2004. Of the 8 birds, 7 began spring migration. The exception was a hen marked at Santee Coastal Reserve, which remained at SCR until its signal was lost in mid April. Rhodes indicated migration of the remaining 7 pintails was somewhat similar to the pintails marked in 2003. One of the somewhat surprising findings has been how much these birds move. A detailed account of migration is provided in the report.

The next species targeted for this project was mallards, given their importance to hunters and decline of the species in South Carolina. DNR personnel captured 6 hen mallards at 3 sites in cooperation with Federal personnel and private landowners. Two mallards were captured at Santee Delta WMA, 2 at Santee National Wildlife Refuge and 2 at Two Rivers Farm (near Columbia). All birds were released at their original capture site. All 6 ducks migrated to the Great Lakes region or points farther west, similar to what banding data reveals. Rhodes stated the third and final year of the project is scheduled for 2005.

A detailed report of these findings was provided to Committee members and a copy is attached to the original minutes.

PHRAGMITES CONTROL UPDATE:

Steve DeKozlowski, Chief, Environmental Conservation Section, and Chris Page, Program Coordinator for the Aquatic Nuisance Species Program in DNR 's Land, Water and Conservation Division provided an update of South Carolina's Aquatic Nuisance Plant Species Program. A power point presentation was given reflecting photographs taken in treating Phragmites. Page stated 710 acres have been treated for Phragmites throughout the State. On Santee Coastal Reserve and Santee Delta WMA 2004 treatments included 264 acres of Phragmites treated with Habitat only and 230 acres of Phragmites treated with a mix of Habitat and Glyphosate. Herbicide work has also been done at Yawkey Wildlife Center, Sandy Island, Murphy Island and Cedar Island, with positive results. According to Page and DeKozlowski, these efforts will continue dependent upon funding availability. A detailed description of the number of acres treated, herbicides used, and associated costs is attached to the original minutes.

OLD BUSINESS:

Smith Ragsdale asked when the Samworth/Santee Delta Oversight Committee report will be made public and what the WAC Chairman's intentions are as far as the Oversight Committee. Chairman McShane reported the report will be presented at the DNR Board meeting on Friday. McShane further stated the Oversight Committee peer reviews will continue and announced there will also be reports for Bear Island and Donnelley.

Ben Moise asked if the Oversight Committee members will remain the same or if new members will be appointed. Chairman McShane stated there will be similarities as well as new stakeholders in Oversight Committee composition.

Lin Fore asked about increased hunting access at Santee Coastal Reserve, stating this is still a concern of The Five Rivers Coalition. Breck Carmichael stated he would recommend we allow Jim Westerhold, the new manager at Santee Coastal Reserve, to get through a period of one year with the staff and resources he has and revisit this issue at the end of the season.

Smith Ragsdale inquired as to the status of the subcommittee to evaluate the Santee Cooper Lake System, working with the Corps of Engineers and Santee Cooper to improve waterfowl habitat in the system. David Wielicki, who chairs the subcommittee, stated that meetings had been held with Congressman Clyburn and representatives from five county delegations surrounding the Santee Cooper lakes. Interest was expressed in supporting the DNR's efforts related to FERC relicensing of the Santee Cooper projects.

NEW BUSINESS:

Derrell Shipes provided an update on AVM (a disease primarily affecting coots and Eagles). Shipes reported DNR continues to monitor this situation and will keep the WAC informed.

Robin Inabinet asked where the DNR Board and the WAC stand on the issue of the "Clyburn bridge." John Frampton stated a letter from the former DNR Board had been written in opposition to the bridge, and he does not anticipate that the current DNR Board would take any different position.

Robin Inabinet also asked about where DNR and the DNR Board stand on released ducks.

An extensive discussion on the pros and cons of captive-reared mallard release programs followed, but no positions or actions were recommended by the WAC.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

Chairman Davis stated DNR Board Member Johnny Evans has offered the use of his facility in Orangeburg, and suggested the WAC meet February 15, 2005 at 10:00 AM in Orangeburg. The Committee concurred and directions will be provided with the agenda and meeting notice.